

HERITAGE COMMISSION

Draft Minutes

January 7, 2010

The Heritage Commission held its regular monthly meeting in the City Council Chambers at 37 Green Street, Concord, New Hampshire, on Thursday, January 7, 2010, at 4:30 p.m.

1. Call to Order and Seating of Alternates:

Chairperson Donovan called the meeting to order at 4:37 p.m.

Present at the meeting were Vice Chairperson Frederick Richards, James McConaha, Marilyn Fraser, Robert V. Johnson, II, Dr. Bryant Tolles, Elizabeth Durfee Hengen, and Chairperson Philip Donovan. City Planner Douglas Woodward, Zoning Administrator Craig Walker, and Administrative Specialist Donna Muir were also present. Absent from the meeting were Committee Members Carol Durgy Brooks and Gerry Blanchette.

It was noted that Dr. Douglas Black was no longer a member of the City Council and therefore would no longer represent the City Council on the Heritage Commission. Mr. Woodward stated that Dr. Black indicated an interest in continuing to be involved with the Heritage Commission as a citizen representative, and that the City Manager has been made aware of Dr. Black's interest.

Chairperson Donovan elevated the alternate members to full member status for the meeting.

2. Minutes of the December 3, 2009 meeting:

The Commission considered the minutes of the December 3, 2009, Heritage Commission meeting. A motion was made by Dr. Tolles to accept the minutes as presented, and Mr. Johnson seconded the motion. Chairperson Donovan asked if there was any discussion regarding the minutes. The motion accepting the minutes of the December 3, 2009, meeting passed unanimously.

3. New Business:

Election of Officers:

Chairperson Donovan turned the meeting over to Mr. Woodward, who opened the floor to receive nominations for the position of Chair of the Heritage Commission. Mr. Johnson nominated Phil Donovan for another term as Chair, and Vice Chair Richards seconded the nomination. As there were no further nominations, Mr. Johnson moved that nominations be closed and that the City Planner be instructed to cast one ballot for Phil Donovan for Chair. Vice Chair Richards seconded the motion. The motion carried. Mr. Woodward then turned the meeting back over to Chairperson Donovan.

Chairperson Donovan opened the floor to receive nominations for the position of Vice Chair of the Heritage Commission. Mr. McConaha nominated Fred Richards for another term as Vice Chair, and Ms. Fraser seconded the nomination. As there were no further nominations, Mr. McConaha moved that nominations be

closed and that Chairperson Donovan be instructed to cast one ballot for the Vice Chair position. Ms. Fraser seconded the motion. The motion carried.

4. Old Business:

Certified Local Government Grant:

Mr. Woodward provided the Heritage Commission with an update of the Certified Local Government Grant (CLG). He stated that he received a Notice of Award from the NH Division of Historical Resources in the amount of \$13,600. The next step is to have the funds appropriated by the City Council. A public hearing has been set for February 8, 2010.

Mr. Woodward received a call from the NH Division of Historical Resources explaining that because the Concord School District proposes to demolish the Conant, Kimball, and Morrill school buildings, the CLG grant awarded to the Heritage Commission could not be used to survey those three buildings. Deborah Gagne, Grants Coordinator for the NH Division of Historical Resources, spoke with Mr. Woodward requesting that the original grant application be revised, removing the three schools scheduled for demolition and reducing the budget accordingly. Mr. McConaha asked why the revised amount of \$18,730 wasn't received. Mr. Woodward wasn't sure of the reasons, but stated that the grant of \$13,600 did not include funds for the survey assistant and computer technician. Costs for travel and supplies would be born by the Heritage Commission's budget. Mr. Woodward also stated that if needed, the Concord High School and Rundlett Middle School buildings would not be surveyed during this grant.

The City of Concord administration had asked whether the Merrimack Valley and Concord School Districts had been aware of the upcoming survey of the school buildings. Mr. Woodward prepared letters to the two school districts for Chairperson Donovan's signature, which would be mailed once the City Council has set the hearing date on the appropriation of the funds from this grant. The letters request that the school districts allow access to their school buildings and make any architectural documents, plans, etc., available to the preservation consultant hired through the grant.

Mr. Woodward stated that given the reduced grant amount, it was not necessary to go through the competitive bidding process to retain a preservation consultant to perform the surveys on the school buildings. Instead, the Heritage Commission could solicit proposals from preservation specialists interested in preparing the school building surveys, as long as three proposals were reviewed.

Mr. McConaha asked whether the solicitation process for proposals could begin prior to the City Council's approval of the appropriation. Mr. Woodward stated that he would check with the City's Purchasing Officer as to whether a caveat could be put into the solicitation letter stating that the appropriation has not been approved by the City Council and also stating that the NH Division of Historical Resources still needed to obtain approval from Governor and Council.

Vice Chair Richards stated that Ms. Hengen was retained by the Concord School District to survey the Kimball, Conant, and Morrill school buildings, as well as the seven houses located near the Kimball school site.

Concord School District Consolidation Plan:

Chairperson Donovan stated that he had delivered the Heritage Commission's letter to the Concord School Board. Chairperson Donovan received an invitation from School Board Chair Kass Ardinger to attend the Facilities Steering Committee and present the Heritage Commission's position on the proposed demolition of the Kimball school building.

[Ms. Hengen joined the meeting at 5:08 p.m.]

Prior to the Steering Committee meeting, Mr. McConaha emailed Chairperson Donovan a two-page document outlining the architect's reasons for not renovating the Kimball school building. Chairperson Donovan stated that he tried to bring up a number of points at the Steering Committee meeting. He was asked pointed questions regarding how the Heritage Commission could be satisfied with the proposals to demolish. It was the consensus of the Steering Committee to demolish the Kimball building and rebuild. The full School Board also agreed to build a new school on the Kimball site and have authorized bonding.

Chairperson Donovan talked about the NH Department of Education's process of approving a waiver to build a school for 500 students on less than a ten-acre site. Both Kimball and Conant schools were included in the original waiver. Mr. Walker stated that new elementary schools require ten acres and the Kimball site is less than 3 acres in size. The Conant site exceeds twenty acres but includes the Rundlett Middle School property. The waiver was predicated on the Kimball School building being renovated, and now the School Board has to apply for another waiver. Mr. McConaha and Chairperson Donovan have discussed what the Heritage Commission could do and suggested that the Heritage Commission letter to the School Board be sent to the NH Department of Education. Mr. McConaha stated that a letter from the NH Division of Historical Resources to the Concord School Board was also sent to the NH Department of Education. He believes that the NH Department of Education will be scrutinizing the applications closely. Mr. Johnson questioned whether the waiver could be appealed to the Superior Court. Mr. Walker stated that Mr. Russell is appealing whether the NH Department of Education has a right to grant the waivers.

Mr. Walker stated that the entire neighborhood is historical and not just the school buildings. Mr. Walker lives in the neighborhood and feels that one City board is disturbing the sanctity of the neighborhood. He stated that the School Board doesn't have to go through Planning Board approval or the City's Engineering Division for traffic studies. Mr. Walker believes that there should be a balance of interest between the School Board, which is exempt, and City ordinances. Ms. Fraser stated that the School Board has not interacted with other City departments. She questioned how the Heritage Commission would get the City boards involved.

Mr. Walker talked of the inequities between the Kimball School site and the other sites, in such areas as traffic congestion, the Master Plan's roadmap, and historic preservation guidelines. Mr. McConaha stated that the NH Department of Education is sensitive to the concept of urban schools and historic neighborhood schools; however, it is still important for the Heritage Commission to be heard by the NH Department of Education. Mr. Johnson said that he feels the community agrees with Mr. Walker's position. He asked whether the Heritage Commission felt it was time for the Heritage Commission and other City boards to make an impact with the NH Department of Education. Mr. McConaha said that in light of the lawsuit, the NH Department of Education may take a closer look at the School Board's application and waiver request. Chairperson Donovan said that the consolidation plan had a lot of moving parts and has been ongoing for a long time. He understands that it was necessary for the School Board to move forward quickly to apply for the State funding.

Chairperson Donovan stated that the first two architects hired by the School Board were leaning toward renovation of the buildings, while the third and current architect is leaning toward demolition and building anew. He stated that if the Heritage Commission goes before the NH Department of Education, the Commission members would need to articulate with what they would be satisfied and their willingness to compromise. Ms. Hengen stated that she feels the seven houses in the Kimball School block were as important historically, and that she has heard comments that the houses were old and dilapidated. She doesn't feel that any of the school buildings or the seven houses should be ranked as more important than any of the others. Ms. Fraser believes that the Heritage Commission should go as far as they have to go and doesn't understand how the Commission would compromise. Mr. McConaha doesn't think that the Heritage Commission is at the point of having to compromise and even if the school buildings are not appropriate to house schools, there may be other uses. Chairperson Donovan stated that he and Mr. Woodward were on the first School Board task force looking into various sites and options for a school consolidation plan. There were strong feelings for maintaining neighborhood schools from the community. Other sites for Kimball School were looked at, though none were appropriate. A decision was made at this point to keep the Kimball School at its current location.

Ms. Hengen stated the new reality is that there is a lot of traffic around the Kimball School and not as many students walking. Mr. Walker stated that Kimball School is located at the farthest corner of the School District's boundaries, and that it would be more appropriate to find another site.

Ms. Hengen asked what the reasons for demolishing Conant School were. Chairperson Donovan stated that the classrooms are smaller than standard size and rehabilitating the school would be a daunting task, while still ending up with substandard classrooms. Mr. Walker stated that a former custodian at Conant School painted a dingy picture of Conant School.

[Mr. Walker left the meeting at 5:56 p.m.]

Chairperson Donovan asked for a consensus from the Heritage Commission for Chairperson Donovan and Mr. McConaha to approach the NH Department of Education to set up a meeting to discuss the Heritage Commission's stance on the projects. Mr. McConaha said that it is his understanding that the NH Department of Education does not want to be involved with local politics, but believes that because the waiver request will need to be acted upon, the NH Department of Education would be more open to hearing from the Heritage Commission. Mr. Johnson asked what the Heritage Commission would expect the long-range outcome of this meeting be.

[Ms. Fraser left the meeting at 6:00 p.m.]

Dr. Tolles suggested having a public display of vintage photographs of the elementary schools. The display could be set up on Main Street in one of the vacant storefronts and historical information about the schools could be made available to the public.

Chairperson Donovan suggested that if the Heritage Commission is going to meet with the NH Department of Education regarding the waiver for the Kimball site and the demolition of other buildings, it is important that talking points are created in advance. He also questioned how the Heritage Commission could talk about the Kimball buildings and not Conant. Mr. Johnson asked whether the waiver would be only for the Kimball site. Chairperson Donovan stated that he didn't know and that discussions had been limited to the Kimball site. Mr. McConaha thought that it would be important not to focus on the waiver issue, but to focus more on the issues

raised in the NH Division of Historical Resources' letter and the letter that was sent to the School Board by the Heritage Commission. Vice Chair Richards thought that there wasn't anything to lose by meeting with the NH Department of Education. The consensus for Chairperson Donovan and Mr. McConaha to meet with the NH Department of Education was unanimous. [Ms. Hengen abstained from the discussion and the vote.]

Governor Isaac Hill Monument:

Chairperson Donovan said he and Mr. Johnson were going to try to set up a meeting with the City Manager after the last Heritage Commission meeting, regarding the placement of the Isaac Hill monument; however, the school consolidation plan issues took precedent. He asked Mr. Johnson to provide an update on the monument. Mr. Johnson stated that he had gone to the bump out site on North Main Street and took pictures on two different days. He stated that snow had not been removed from the bump out on either of those days, which appears to negate the City's argument of not placing the monument on the bump out because of snow removal. Mr. Johnson stated that he still doesn't feel that Eagle Square is the correct place for the monument.

A couple of months ago, Mr. McConaha gave Mr. Woodward a sealed envelope containing his rendition of how the Governor Isaac Hill monument came to be located at the Goodwill Store on Loudon Road. Prior to the Heritage Commission meeting, Mr. McConaha asked Mr. Woodward to share the contents of his letter at the January 2010 Heritage Commission meeting. Mr. Woodward read the letter. Mr. McConaha said that he used tax records and talked to numerous individuals to come up with his synopsis.

Volunteer for Heritage Commission's Sign Program:

Mr. Hengen stated that she knows a woman who is interested in volunteering to help with the Heritage Commission's Sign Program. This woman wants to obtain a sign for her home and through the process she would learn how to check a home's history. She would then be able to help others who want to go through the process of obtaining a Heritage Commission sign. Chairperson Donovan felt that would be a worthy project for this volunteer. Ms. Hengen stated that she would set up a meeting with Ms. Brooks and the prospective volunteer.

There being no further business or discussion, a motion was made by Vice Chair Richards and seconded by Dr. Tolles to adjourn the meeting. The Chairman adjourned the meeting at 6:35 p.m.

A TRUE RECORD ATTEST:

Donna Muir
Administrative Specialist
Planning Division